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London terror attack: SA Education Minister Susan Close was just '15 steps' away from scene of attack

SOUTH Australian Education Minister Susan Close was just "15 steps away" from the scene of the overnight attack in London when she heard gunshots ring out.

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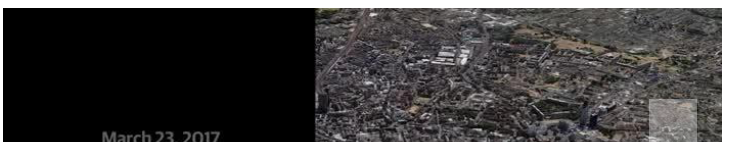
SOUTH Australian Education Minister Susan Close was just "15 steps away" from the scene of the overnight attack in London when she heard gunshots ring out.

Dr Close, who is in London on State Government business, at

first thought the noise could have been a car backfiring but the build-up of traffic and people in the area suggested something more sinister.

"I don't think I've ever heard gunshots before," she told advertiser.com.au by phone from her hotel in the British capital.

"If I was in Adelaide I would think it was a backfire but ... in retrospect it was very clear something was wrong.



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“People weren’t moving past the corner of the road and there was a lot of traffic banked up.

“Someone nearby said ‘I think there’s something bad happening on the other side of that traffic’. We just stood there wondering, and then we heard the gunshots.”

Dr close estimated she was about “15 steps away” from the scene outside London’s Westminster Parliament building, as she was due to attend a meeting in a nearby office.

However, she did not witness the attack.

A knife-wielding man went on a rampage in London’s heart overnight, plowing a car into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge before stabbing an armed police officer to death inside the gates of Parliament about 2.40pm Wednesday (1.10am Thursday Adelaide time). The attacker later died in hospital.

Minister for Education and Child Development Susan Close MP was “15 steps away” from the attack scene. Picture: File

Alexander Downer was also in London at the time of the attack. Picture: AFP/Daniel Leal-Olivas

“That this man was able to kill a police officer with a knife in front of Parliament, it’s absolutely horrifying,” she said.

“But the speed of the emergency response was absolutely inspiring.

“There were just so many ambulances, and fire trucks. The air was just full of sirens.

“I was really concerned about how many people were involved in what was going on.”

Dr Close left the area to walk back to her hotel, stopping on the way to contact family to let them know she was safe.

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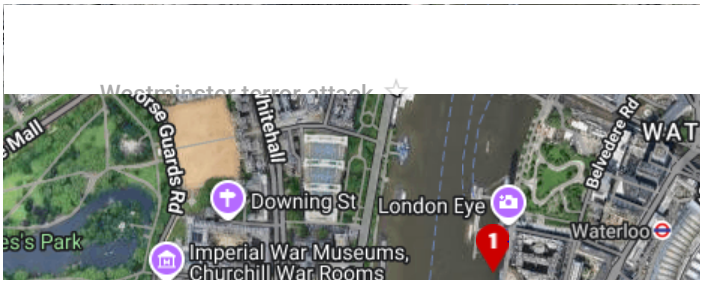
“At no point was I in danger. I happened to be closer than most people but I was safe,” she said.

Asked whether the attack made her consider the safety of MPs at South Australia’s Parliament House, on North Tce in the CBD, Dr Close said security was always being reviewed but she expressed great confidence in police and security staff who guard the building.

A State Government spokesman said there were no plans to increase security at Parliament House, and police say the security arrangements at Parliament House are appropriate for Australia’s current national terror threat level, which remains unchanged at probable.

In a statement online Premier Jay Weatherill urged South Australians to “stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of London”.

“Again, today in Australia we woke to international news that is somehow both unbelievable and familiar,” he wrote.



“Let us do all we can to support them — even if from afar — and ultimately ensure that truth and love triumph over fear and hatred.”

Meanwhile, Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Alexander Downer says embassies are waiting for details about the victims’ nationalities.

“There’s no information that would lead us to conclude that there’s any Australians,” the former South Australian Liberal politician told *The Advertiser*.

“ ... There’s a real lockdown here, police have got to pursue their investigation.”

At the time of the attack, Mr Downer was returning from a meeting at Somerset House, near Waterloo Bridge, to the Australian High Commission, nearby along the Strand, and did not witness the carnage.

But last night, London time, he hosted a function for South Australia and the French region of Brittany, where the company that will build of Australia’s future submarines in Adelaide, DCNS, has a major shipyard.

Mr Downer said the event was particularly poignant because three of the victims were Brittany school students, so French officials were regularly seeking updates.

The Australian High Commission would be seeking further information throughout the night but Londoners generally were continuing normal lives amid the heightened security.

“People are just going on with their business,” Mr Downer said.

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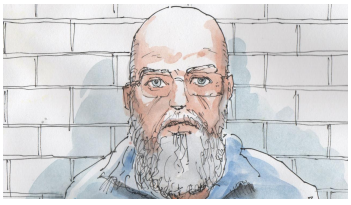

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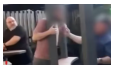

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